



A Midsummer's Hike through the Forest



It was a beautiful summer afternoon: the dusty sunlight sifted through the towering old-growth cedars and firs, the Collawash River could be heard off the trail a few hundred yards, and insect wings showed up iridescent when seen through the translucent light. As I continued along the trail to Bagby Hot Springs, the area seemed timeless and magical. Maybe that's why I wasn't terribly surprised when I saw a nymph dressed up in bright colors with a surprised look on her face hanging upside down in a tree near the trail.

These sorts of encounters became very commonplace for the audience members attending the Fuse Theater Company production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The production took place along a mile and a half stretch of the trail to Bagby Hot Springs, incorporating the forest topography and vegetation into the play's plot and character development. Beyond seeing nymphs hanging from tree branches, the characters were able to hide under fallen massive tree trunks, navigate steep terrain, and be awakened by the morning's sunlight through the filter of the thick green canopy.

"In a lot of ways, the forest does the acting for us," said Nikolas Hoback who played the dynamic Puck and is one of the Company's staff members. "It both adds challenge and great possibilities for me as an actor and brings the story closer for audience members since the setting of this play is a forest."

Along with the role of Puck, Hoback also played Philostrate, who acted as a guide for the audience, leading the audience—called the “Wedding Party” by the actors—along the trail and stopping from time to time to allow the actors to tell the story. This interactive style made audience members feel more like a part of the story rather than simply passively watching, but this dynamic staging posed challenges for the stage manager.



“We essentially had a mile and a half long stage. We couldn’t plan blocking simply by calling a prop a tree obviously because there are hundreds of trees along the path,” said Kacey Manny stage manager for the production. “We ended up staging actors around certain *descriptions* of trees instead. This style of staging made it tough, but it was really exciting too.”

Having this type of permit was new and rather exciting for the Mt. Hood National Forest as well. Joy Woodcock, permit administrator for the show, says it was quite refreshing to work with the acting group.



“The Forest Service is used to working with timber contractors, river guides, or cycling clubs,” said Woodcock. “It’s different to be working with actors producing a Shakespearean play, but it’s just as valid of a use of our National Forest.”

Through permits like this one with the Fuse Theater Company, the public gets to experience a new way of enjoying their forest lands. As I

hiked back down the trail, along the many bridges over small streams being shaded by the towering trees with branches blanketed in a thick wooly coat of moss, I was reminded of just how enchanted this stretch of dense forest can seem and how much more easily audience members could suspend their disbelief and imagine themselves being truly among nymphs and fairies. “We couldn’t ask for

a more beautiful set,” said Kate Mura, staff member of the Company and a part of the acting troupe for *Midsummer*. “We really couldn’t design a play in this way without the cooperation of the Forest Service.”

